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The Textual History of the Qur'an and the Bible

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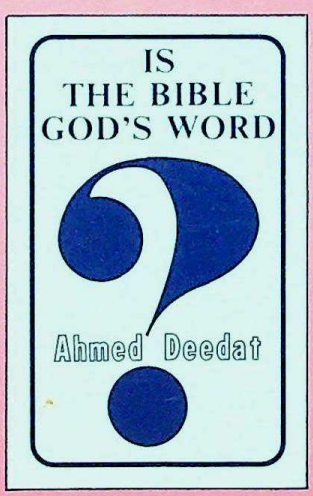

BY

JOHN GILCHRIST

An objective study of the evidences for the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible

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JOHN GILCHRIST

The Textual History of the Qur'an and the Bible

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A Study of the Qur'an and the Bible

Most Muslims do not believe that it is becoming of a true Muslim to condemn another man's religion. Certain exceptions to this rule exist, however, one of whom is Ahmed Deedat who regularly attacks Christians and their religion in a spirit reminiscent of the Crusades of old. One of his recent efforts to condemn Christianity is his booklet entitled *Is the Bible God's Word?*, first published by his Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban in 1980.

In this publication Deedat endeavours to prove that the Bible cannot be the Word of God. To the ignorant and unlearned his treatise may appear to be impressive, if not convincing, but those who have any real knowledge of the texts and textual history of the Qur'an and the Bible will see through his petty efforts immediately.

It seems that Deedat is well aware of the inherent weakness of his case and, to cover it up, has resorted to bold and challenging statements to give the impression that a convincing and unanswerable dissertation is before the reader's eyes. In a report on a symposium Deedat was once involved in A.S. K. Joommal said: "Even if one's case is weak and untenable, it is possible for one's oratorical prowess to carry one through and sway the multitudes in one's favour".

We know Joommal has relied on this very method in his book *The Bible: Word of God or Word of Man?*, referred to by Deedat on pp. 44 and 51), and it certainly appears that Deedat himself has resorted to this same tactic in his booklet against the Bible. Both of them are obviously acutely and painfully

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aware of the "untenable" nature of their supposed case against our Holy Scriptures.

Deedat audaciously suggests, on page 14 of his booklet, that if a Muslim should ever hand his publication to a missionary or Jehovah's Witnesses and request a written reply, he will never see them ever again - let alone ever get a reply.

We Christians are somewhat tired of the efforts this man has made over the years to discredit our faith but, to dispel the fond illusion that his booklet will chase any missionary back to his home for good, we have decided to formulate the reply he has requested. We have replied to other publications he has produced in the past and note with interest that, whereas we are always able to refute his assaults, he invariably proves incapable of saying anything further in reply to us. This seems to prove a point.

1. "THREE GRADES OF EVIDENCE".

Deedat begins his booklet with quotes from two Christian authors, Scroggie and Cragg, to the effect that there is a positive human element in the Bible. He then boldly concludes:

> Both these doctors of religion are telling us in the clearest language humanly possible that the Bible is the handiwork of man.
> (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.2).

What he subtly omits to do, however, is to inform his readers, firstly, that the Christian Church has always held that the Word of God was written by men under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1. 20-21), and, secondly, that these authors were not "letting the cat out of the bag" (as

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Deedat fondly imagines) but were setting out to show how God has in fact revealed his Word.

Deedat's quote from Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret* is very astutely wrenched from its context. Cragg speaks of the human element in the Bible to demonstrate a decisive advantage that the Bible enjoys over the Qur'an. Whereas the Qur'an is alleged to be free of any human element, in the Bible God has deliberately chosen to reveal his Word through the writings of his inspired prophets and apostles so that his Word may not only be conveyed to man but may be communicated to his understanding and powers of comprehension as well. The apostle not only receives the Word of God but is able himself, infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit, to convey its meaning to his readers. This the Qur'an cannot do if it has no human element as is generally alleged.

Deedat then ingeniously divides the Bible into "three different kinds of witnessing" (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.4), namely the *Word of God*, *Words of a Prophet of God* and *Words of an Historian*. He then quotes passages where God speaks, others where Jesus speaks, and lastly where things are said of Jesus, proudly suggesting that the Muslims are careful to separate these three. He states that the *Qur'an* alone has the Word of God, the *Hadith* has the Words of the Prophet, and other books have the writings of historians. He concludes by saying:

> The Muslim keeps the above three types of evidence jealously apart, in their proper gradations of authority. He never equates them.
> (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.6).

We find it most astonishing that a man who poses as a scholar of Islam should make such a claim. He must surely know that there is no truth in his

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statement at all. Firstly the Qur'an contains many passages which record the words of the *prophets* of God. For example, we read that *Zakariya*, the prophet said:

> How can I have a son when age hath overtaken me already and my wife is barren? *Surah 3.40*

If, as Deedat suggests, the Qur'an only contains the Word of God while the words of prophets are only found in the Hadith, it is extremely difficult to see how these words can ever be attributed to God! Secondly there is a passage in the Qur'an which clearly contains the words of angels to Muhammad and not the Word of God to him as is generally alleged:

> We come not down save by commandment of thy Lord. Unto him belongeth all that is before us and all that is behind us and all that is between these two, and thy Lord was never forgetful. *Surah 19.64*

There is no hint in the Qur'an as to who is speaking but these words are clearly addressed to Muhammad *directly* by their authors. From the text itself it is quite clear that these are the words of angels and not of God.

Furthermore we find in the *Hadith* many words which are not the words of any prophet but obviously of God himself. These sayings are known as *Hadith-i-Qudsi* (divine sayings) and here is an example:

> Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said: Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, said: I have prepared for my pious servants which eye has seen not, and the ear has heard not and no human heart has perceived

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such bounties leaving aside those about which Allah has informed you.

(*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1476).

The Hadith are full of such sayings. Furthermore much of the Qur'an and Hadith read like the passages in the Bible which are alleged to be the words of an historian. The passage in the Qur'an which relates the birth of Jesus from his mother Mary reads precisely like the "third type" quoted in Deedat's booklet:

> And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of a palm tree.
>
> *Surah 19. 22-23.*

What the Qur'an says here of Mary is no different in narrative form to what Mark 11.13 says of Jesus. Nevertheless Deedat, using this verse in Mark as an example, says such narratives are not found in the Qur'an!

We must conclude that Deedat's effort to distinguish between the Qur'an and the Bible is founded on totally false premises. The Qur'an has the words of prophets and historical narratives throughout its pages and no one can honestly say that it contains the alleged words of God alone. Furthermore the Hadith also contain alleged sayings of God as well as those of prophets. When Deedat says that these three types of evidence - words of God, prophets and historians - are kept "jealously apart" by the Muslims, he makes a blatantly false statement - one typical of the many we find in his booklet.

It is apparent right from the outset that Deedat's arguments against the Bible are unjustified and the trend continues right through his booklet.

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2. THE "MULTIPLE BIBLE VERSIONS".

Deedat begins his third chapter by denying that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures constituting the Holy Bible are those honoured by the Qur'an as the *Taurat* and *Injil* respectively (the Law and the Gospel - i.e., the Old and New Testaments). Instead he suggests that the real Taurat and Injil were different books entirely which were allegedly revealed to Moses and Jesus respectively.

This attempt to distinguish between the books of the Holy Bible and those referred to in the Qur'an is, to say the least, very difficult to consider with any seriousness. No matter how widely this view may be held in the Muslim world, there is no evidence of any nature whatsoever to support it.

At no time in history has there ever been any proof that books as such were "revealed" to Moses and Jesus, or that any other *Taurat* (Law) or *Injil* (Gospel) other than the books of the Old and New Testaments ever existed. Furthermore, as we shall show, the Qur'an itself does not distinguish these books from the Holy Scriptures of the Jews and the Christians but, on the contrary, openly admits that they are those books which the Jews and Christians themselves hold to be the Word of God.

Significantly, in trying to establish his theory that the *Taurat* and *Injil* were books other than those found in the Bible, Deedat has to resort inevitably to pure subjectivism. He bleats *We Muslims believe ... we believe ... we sincerely believe ...* but is incapable of producing even the slightest degree of evidence in favour of these beliefs. Surprisingly he proves to be guilty of the very "mulish mentality" he wrongly attributes to Christians in his booklet (see p.3).

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All we can say in response to these stated beliefs is that all the evidence of history weighs irreversibly against them and that they are accordingly purely speculative and devoid of any foundation whatsoever.

In passing, however, we must comment that, in the light of Deedat's claim that the Qur'an has been *perfectly preserved and protected from human tampering* by God himself for fourteen centuries (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.7), it is rather astonishing to discover that the same God proved singularly incapable of preserving even a record of the fact that such a *Taurat* or an *Injil* ever even existed - let alone preserve the books themselves! We find such a paradox fundamentally impossible to believe - for the Eternal Ruler of the universe will surely act consistently at all times. You cannot expect us to believe that God has miraculously preserved one of his books perfectly for centuries and yet proved absolutely powerless to preserve independently in human history even so much as a record that other such books ever existed. We find this too hard to swallow.

In any event, as we have seen already, the Qur'an itself unambiguously confirms that the *Taurat* of the Jews was the book regarded as such by them at the time of Muhammad and that the *Injil* likewise was the book in the possession of the Christians at that time which they themselves considered to be the Word of God. At no time in history have Jews and Christians ever regarded any books as the sacred Word of God other than those constituting the Old and New Testaments as we know them today.

At the time of Muhammad the Jews universally knew only one Taurat - the books of the Old Testament precisely as they are today. So at the same time the Christians knew only one Injil - the books

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of the New Testament exactly as they are found today. Useful Qur'anic texts proving the point are:

> How come they unto thee for judgment when they have the Torah wherein Allah hath revealed judgment? *Surah 5.43*

> Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. *Surah 5.47*

It is impossible to consider how the Christians of Muhammad's time could ever judge by the Gospel (*Injil*) if they were not in possession of it. In Surah 7.157 the Qur'an again admits that the Taurat and Injil were in possession of the Jews and Christians at the time of Muhammad and that they were those books which these two groups themselves accepted as the Law and the Gospel respectively. No one can honestly say that these two books were other than those of the Old and New Testaments as they are found in the Bible today.

Furthermore it is most significant to note that distinguished commentators like Baidawi and Zamakshari openly admit that *Injil* is not an original Arabic word but is borrowed from the Syriac word used by the Christians themselves to describe the Gospel. Indeed, whereas some early Qur'anic scholars tried to find an Arabic origin for it, these two men of authority rejected the theory with undisguised contempt (Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, p.71). This substantiates all the more the conclusion that the Injil was not a phantom book revealed as such to Jesus, all trace of which has strangely disappeared, but rather the New Testament itself precisely as we know it today. The same can be said for the Taurat as the word is obviously of Hebrew origin and is the title which the Jews them-

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selves have always given to the books of the Old Testament as we know it today.

Therefore the Qur'an unreservedly admits that the Bible itself is the true Word of God. Deedat knows this for a fact and therefore tries to circumvent the implications by suggesting that there are "multiple" Bible versions in circulation today. This is a very artful misrepresentation of the truth.

He fails to inform his readers that he is really referring to different *English translations* of the Bible which are widely distributed in the world today. He speaks of the King James Version (KJV), Revised Version (RV), and Revised Standard Version (RSV) but, in the name of honesty, he should have made it clear that these are not differing editions of the Bible itself but simply different English translations of it. All three are based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments respectively which have been preserved intact by the Christian Church since centuries before the time of Muhammad. We shall presently consider the differences between them but it will be useful to refer here to a furore which raged among the Muslim leaders of South Africa in 1978 over the distribution of an English translation of the Qur'an by Muhammad Asad. (As with the Bible, there are numerous different translations of the Qur'an in English as well).

Reaction against Asad's translation was so vehement that the Islamic Council of South Africa, in a public statement, openly discouraged distribution of this book among the Muslims of South Africa. At no time has any English translation of the Bible ever been treated so drastically. Therefore readers must not be duped by Deedat's suggestion that "multiple" versions of the Bible exist and should appre-

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ciate immediately that he is pulling the wool over his readers' eyes when he suggests that the Christian Church does not have just *one* Bible.

3. THE APOCRYPHA.

Deedat then proceeds to make another blatantly false charge when he suggests that the *Protestants have bravely expunged seven whole books* from the Bible (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.9), the books being those that constitute the *Apocrypha*. It seems that there is very poor information about the Bible at Deedat's disposal for these books are of *Jewish* origin and the authors never intended to write Scripture, nor have they ever formed part of the Jewish Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, which we Christians accept as the Word of God. Therefore they have not been expunged from the Bible as Deedat erroneously suggests. Only the Roman Catholics, for reasons best known to themselves, give them the authority of Scripture.

4. THE "GRAVE DEFECTS".

With his customary aggressiveness Deedat then challenges the believing Christian to *steel himself for the unkindest blow of all* as though what he was about to say was entirely unknown to us. He quotes these words from the preface to the RSV which are underlined in his booklet:

> Yet the King James Version has grave defects... these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision.
> (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.11).

These "defects" are nothing but a number of variant readings which were generally unknown to the translators who composed the KJV early in the seven-

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teenth century. The RSV of this century has identified these readings and they are noted as footnotes on the relevant pages of its text. Furthermore, where a verse like 1 John 5.7 appears in the KJV (because the translators took it from later manuscripts), the RSV has omitted it altogether (as it is not found in the oldest texts of the New Testament in the original Greek).

Firstly, we must again point out that the KJV and RSV are *English translations* of the original Greek texts and that these texts, as they are preserved for us, have in no way been changed. (We have about 4000 Greek texts dating back to not less than two hundred years before Muhammad and Islam).

Secondly, there is no *material alteration* of any form in the structure, teaching or doctrine of the Bible in the revised translation referred to. Throughout the KJV, the RSV, and other English translations, the essence and substance of the Bible is totally unchanged.

Thirdly, these are not *differing versions* of the Bible. We have heard it said that there is only "one Qur'an" whereas Christians have different versions of the Bible. This is a totally false comparison for these "versions" of the Bible are, it needs again be said, only English translations of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. There are many such English translations of the Qur'an as well but no one suggests that these are "different versions" of the Qur'an. In the same way we have many English translations but, as a cursory comparison of these will immediately show, we have just *one Bible*.

We freely admit that there are variant readings in the Bible. We believe, as Christians, in being entirely honest at all times and our consciences do

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not allow us to avoid the facts, nor do we believe anything can sincerely be achieved in pretending such variants do not exist.

On the contrary we do not consider that these variant readings prove that the Bible has been changed as such. The effect they have on the book is so slight and, indeed, so negligible that we know we can confidently assert that the Bible, as a whole, is intact and has never been changed in any way.

We have never ceased to be amazed, however, at the general Muslim claim that the Qur'an has never been changed whereas the Bible has allegedly been so corrupted that it is no longer what it was and therefore cannot be regarded as the Word of God. All the evidence history has bequeathed to us in respect of the textual history of the Qur'an and the Bible suggests, rather, that both books are remarkably intact in the form in which they were originally written but that neither has escaped the presence, here and there, of variant readings in the text. We can only presume that the fond illusion of Qur'anic inerrancy and Biblical corruption is the figment of pure expediency, a convenient way - indeed, as the evidence shows, a desperate and drastic way - of explaining away the fact that the Taurat and Injil are actually Christian rather than Islamic in content and teaching. Whatever the reason for this myth, we know we speak the truth when we say that *the suggestion that the Qur'an is unchanged while the Bible has been changed on many occasions is the greatest lie ever proclaimed in the name of truth.*

It is time the Muslim doctors of religion in the world told their pupils and students the truth. There is abundant evidence that, when the Qur'an was first collated by the Caliph Uthman into one standard text, there were numerous texts in existence

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which all contained a host of variant readings. During his reign reports were brought to him that, in various parts of Syria, Armenia and Iraq, Muslims were reciting the Qur'an in a way different to that in which those in Arabia were reciting it. Uthman immediately called for the manuscript of the Qur'an which was in the possession of Hafsah (one of the wives of Muhammad and the daughter of Umar) and ordered Zaid-b-Thabit and three others to make copies of the text and to correct it wherever necessary. When these were complete we read that Uthman took drastic action regarding the other manuscripts of the Qur'an in existence:

> Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.479).

At no time in Christian history has anyone attempted to standardise just one copy of the Bible as the true one while attempting to have all the others destroyed. Why did Uthman make such an order regarding the other Qur'ans in circulation? We can only presume that he believed that they contained "grave defects" - so "many and so serious as to call" not for revision but for *wholesale destruction*. In other words, if we assess the textual history of the Qur'an just at this point, we find that the Qur'an standardised as the correct one is that which a *man* (and not God), according to his *own discretion* (and not by revelation), decreed to be the true one. We fail to see on what grounds this copy was regarded as the only perfect one available and will shortly produce evidence that the codex of Ibn Mas'ud had a far greater claim to be the best one available. (Indeed not one could seriously be regarded as perfect in the light of the many differences between them).

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It is practically certain that there was not one Qur'an in existence which agreed with Hafsah's copy in every detail for all other copies were ordered to be burnt. This kind of evidence most certainly does not in any way back up the fallacy that the Qur'an has never been changed in any way.

Firstly, there is incontrovertible evidence that even this one "Revised Standard Version" of the Qur'an was anything but perfect. In the most accredited works of Islamic tradition we read that even *after* these copies were sent out the same Zaid recalled a verse which was missing. He testified:

> A verse from Surat Ahzab was missed by me when we copied the Qur'an and I used to hear Allah's Apostle reciting it. So we searched for it and found it with Khuzaima-bin-Thabit al Ansari. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.479).

The verse was Surah 33.23. Therefore, if the evidence is to be believed (and there is none to the contrary), there was *not one Qur'an* at the time of Uthman's reclension which was perfect.

Secondly, there is similar evidence that, to this day, verses and, indeed, whole passages are still omitted from the Qur'an. We are told that Umar in his reign as Caliph stated that certain verses prescribing stoning for adultery were recited by Muhammad as part of the Qur'an in his lifetime:

> God sent Muhammad and sent down the Scripture to him. Part of what he sent down was the passage on stoning, we read it, we were taught it, and we heeded it. The apostle stoned and we stoned them after him. I fear that in time to come men will say that they find no mention of stoning in God's book and thereby go astray in

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neglecting an ordinance which God has sent down. Verily stoning in the book of God is a penalty laid on married men and women who commit adultery. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulullah*, p.684).

Here is clear evidence that the Qur'an, as it stands today, is still not "perfect" as the verse about stoning of adulterers remains absent from the text. Elsewhere in the Hadith we find further evidence that certain verses and passages once formed part of the Qur'an but are now omitted from its text. It is quite clear, therefore, that the *textus receptus* of the Qur'an in the world today is not the *textus originalis*.

Going back to the texts which were marked for the fire, however, we find that in every case there were considerable differences between these and the text which Uthman decided, according to his own discretion, to standardise as the best text of the Qur'an. Furthermore these differences were not purely dialectal, as is often suggested. In many cases we find that they were "real textual variants and not mere dialectal peculiarities" (Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture*).

In some cases there were consonantal variants in certain words, in others the variants concerned whole clauses, and here and there words and sentences were found in some codices that were omitted in others. There were some fifteen different codices affected by these differences.

We shall now consider the text of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. (What can be said of his codex generally applies to the others destroyed by Uthman's command as well). His text was regarded by the local community at Kufa as their official reclension of the Qur'an and when Uthman first sent out the order that

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all the texts besides that in Hafsah's possession were to be burnt, for some time Ibn Mas'ud refused to relinquish his codex and it rivalled the codex of Hafsah as the official text.

Ibn Mas'ud was one of the very first Muslims and also one of the earliest teachers among those who taught the reading and recitation of the Qur'an. Indeed he was widely regarded as being one of the best authorities on its text. On one occasion he recited more than seventy surahs of the Qur'an in Muhammad's presence and no one found fault with his recitation (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1312). Indeed in the same highly respected collection of traditions of Imam Muslim we read:

> Masruq reported: They made mention of Ibn Mas'ud before Abdullah b. Amr whereupon he said: He is a person whose love is always fresh in my heart after I heard Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four persons: from Ibn Mas'ud, Salim, the ally of Abu Hudhaifa, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Mu'adh b. Jabal.
> (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1313).

According to another work of Hadith, this same Ibn Mas'ud was present when Muhammad allegedly reviewed the Qur'an with Gabriel each year (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.441). In a similar tradition we read that Muhammad said:

> Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four: from Abdullah bin Mas'ud - *he started with him* - Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, Mu'adh bin Jabal, and Ubai bin Ka'b.
> (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, pp. 96-97).

The words italicised are the comment of the re-

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porter of the tradition, namely Masruq. They show that, of all Muslims at that time, Ibn Mas'ud was the foremost authority on the Qur'an.

Records of many variant readings in the codices of both Salim and Ubai bin Ka'b exist but, as Ibn Mas'ud was especially singled out before the others by Muhammad himself, it is astonishing to discover that his text varied from the others (including Hafsah's) so often that the different readings involved are set out in no less than *ninety pages* of Arthur Jeffery's collection of variants in the various codices (Cf. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, pp. 24-114). The author has taken his evidence from numerous Islamic sources which are documented in his book. There are no less than *149 cases* in Surah 2 *alone* where his text differed from the others in circulation, in particular the text of Hafsah.

Furthermore one of the reasons he gave for refusing to abandon his codex in favour of Hafsah's was that the latter text was compiled by Zaid-b-Thabit who was still only in the loins of an unbeliever when he had already become one of the closest companions of Muhammad.

Two things emerge from all this. Firstly, it appears that the text of Ibn Mas'ud had far better grounds than that of Hafsah for being the best text of the Qur'an available - in particular as Muhammad had considered him to be the first of the four best authorities on the Qur'an. Secondly, there were voluminous textual variants between the two texts - literally thousands which are all, without exception, documented in Jeffery's book.

Allowing further for the fact that there were about a dozen other primary codices of prominent men

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like Salim and Ubai bin Ka'b and that these differed radically from Hafsah's text as well (often agreeing with the text of Ibn Mas'ud instead!), we must conclude that the evidence available totally negates the fond illusion that there is no proof that the Qur'an has never been changed. Jeffery's book contains 362 pages of incontrovertible evidence that the foremost codices of the Qur'an in those all-important early days differed widely from one another in many respects. Therefore the Qur'an, too, has suffered from variant readings and in no way can any man with an honest conscience before God suggest that the Qur'an is free from the "grave defects" found in the textual history of the Bible. This is a fallacy expediently propagated in astonishing defiance of the cold facts to the contrary.

The truth is that *the textual history of the Qur'an is very similar to that of the Bible* (Guillaume, *Islam*, p.58). Both books have been preserved remarkably well. Each is, in its basic structure and content, a very fair record of what was originally there. But neither book has been preserved totally without error or textual defect. Both have suffered here and there from variant readings in the early codices known to us but neither has in any way been corrupted. Sincere Christians and Muslims will honestly acknowledge these facts.

The only difference between the Qur'an and the Bible today is that the Christian Church has, in the interests of truth, carefully preserved the variant readings that exist in the Biblical text whereas the Muslims at the time of Uthman deemed it expedient to destroy as far as possible all evidences of different readings of the Qur'an in the cause of standardising one text for the whole of the Muslim world. There may well be only one text of the Qur'an in circulation today, but no one can honestly claim that it is exac-

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tly that which Muhammad handed down to his companions. No one has ever shown why Hafsah's text deserved to be regarded as infallible and the evidence, on the contrary, suggests that Ibn Mas'ud's text had a far greater right to be regarded as the best available. These facts must also always be considered against the background of further evidence in the Hadith that the Qur'an today is still not complete.

It does not help to say that all Qur'ans in the world today are the same. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link - and the weak link in the chain of the textual history of the Qur'an is found right at this point where, in those crucial early days, different and differing codices of the Qur'an existed and other evidence was given that the text finally standardised as the best one was still far from being complete or in any way perfect.

Only those who have neither love for truth nor respect for valid evidences will claim that the Bible has been corrupted while the Qur'an is allegedly unchanged. Such men may fondly imagine that the cause of their faith is being greatly served with such distortions of truth. But God, who is true and who loves the truth, will assuredly set his face against their questionable propaganda.

5. FIFTY THOUSAND ERRORS?

Deedat then produces a reproduction of a page from a magazine entitled *Awake* dating back some twenty-three years published by the Jehovah's Witnesses (a non-Christian minority cult) which quotes a secular magazine *Look* to the effect that there are some "modern students" who "say" that there are probably "50,000 errors in the Bible".

Very significantly no mention is made of the

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identity of these so-called modern students, nor is even the slightest evidence given of just a sample of this alleged abundance of errors. We can only presume that this allegation is purely rhetorical and stems from excessive prejudice against the Bible and all that it teaches.

Unfortunately those who share this prejudice willy-nilly swallow anything they read against the Bible - no matter how far-fetched or absurd it may be. In the same way Deedat takes as established fact any charge he reads against the Bible without the slightest effort to verify it. We find it hard to take him seriously when he says:

> We do not have the time and space to go into the tens of thousands of - grave or minor - defects that the authors of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) have attempted to revise.
> (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?* p.14).

What he means is that he *does not know* of tens of thousands of errors in the Bible. Of these alleged fifty thousand defects he produces just four for our consideration. Now we must presume that a man with such an alleged wealth of errors at his disposal will be able to provide, in just four cases, very substantial evidence of total corruption in the Bible. We are also surely entitled to presuppose that these four examples will be the very best he can produce. Let us examine them.

a). The first - and presumably foremost - "error" in the Bible is allegedly found in Isaiah 7.14:

> Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
> *Isaiah 7.14* (KJV).

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In the RSV we read instead of the word *virgin* that a *young woman* would conceive and bear a son. According to Deedat, this is supposed to be one of the foremost errors in the Bible.

The word in the original Hebrew is *almah* - a word found in every Hebrew text of Isaiah. Therefore there is no change of any nature in the original text. The issue is purely one of interpretation and translation. The common Hebrew word for virgin is *bethulah* whereas *almah* refers to a young woman - and always an unmarried one. So the RSV translation is a perfectly good literal rendering of the word. But, as there are always difficulties translating from one language to another, and as a good translator will try to convey the real meaning of the original, most English translations translate the word as *virgin*. The reason is that the context of the word demands such an interpretation. (Muslims who have translated the Qur'an into English have often experienced similar problems with the original Arabic text. A literal rendering of a word or text may lose the implied meaning in the original language).

The conception of the child was to be a sign to Israel. Now there would be no sign in the simple conception of a child in the womb of an unmarried woman. Such a thing is commonplace throughout the world. The sign is clearly that a *virgin* would conceive and bear a son. That would be a real sign - and so it was when Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy by being conceived of the Virgin Mary.

Isaiah uses the word *almah* rather than *bethulah* because the latter word not only means a virgin but also a chaste widow (as in Joel 1.8). Those who translate it as a young woman (so the RSV) give a literal rendering of the word whereas those who translate it as virgin (so the KJV) give its meaning

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in its context. Either way the young woman was a virgin as Mary duly was when Jesus was conceived. The issue is purely one of translation and interpretation from the original Hebrew into English. It has absolutely nothing to do with the textual integrity of the Bible as such. So Deedat's first point falls entirely to the ground.

b). His second text is John 3.16 which reads in the King James Version as follows:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. *John 3.16*

In the RSV we read that he gave *his only Son* and Deedat charges that the omission of the word "begotten" proves that the Bible has been changed. Once again, however, this is purely a matter of interpretation and translation for the original Greek word properly means *unique*. Either way there is no difference between "only Son" and "only begotten Son" for both are fair translations of the original Greek and make the same point: *Jesus is the unique Son of God*. (We cannot understand Deedat's claim that the RSV has brought the Bible nearer to the Qur'an which denies that Jesus is the Son of God. In the RSV the fact that he is indeed the unique Son of God is emphasised in the same terms as in the KJV). We need to emphasise once again that there is *no change* in the original Greek text and that the issue is purely one of interpretation and translation. So Deedat's second point falls away as well.

To illustrate our point further we can refer to Deedat's quote from Surah 19.88 where we read that Christians say that God *Most Gracious has begotten a Son*. He has taken this from Yusuf Ali's translation

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of the Qur'an. Now in the translations of Pickthall, Muhammad Ali and Maulana Daryabadi, we do not find the word *begotten* but rather *taken*. If Deedat's line of reasoning is to be believed, then here is evidence that the Qur'an, too, has been changed!

We know our Muslim readers will immediately tell us that these are only English translations and that the original Arabic has not been changed even though the word "begotten" is not found in the other versions of the Qur'an. So we in turn plead with you to be quite realistic about this as well - nothing can be said against the integrity of the Bible just because the word "begotten", as in the Qur'an, is only found in one translation and not in another.

c). Deedat's third example is, we admit, one of the defects the RSV set out to correct. In 1 John 5.7 in the KJV we find a verse outlining the unity of the Father, Word and Holy Ghost which is omitted in the RSV. It appears that this verse was originally set out as a marginal note in an early text and that it was mistaken by later transcribers as part of the actual text. It is omitted in all modern translations because we now have older texts of greater authority where it is not found.

Deedat suggests that *this verse is the closest approximation to what the Christians call their Holy Trinity in the encyclopaedia called the BIBLE* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.16). If it was, or alternatively, if the whole doctrine of the Trinity was based on this one text alone, then indeed this would be a matter for very serious consideration. On the contrary any honest expositor of Biblical theology will freely admit - as all Catholics, Protestants and other Christians uniformly do - that the doctrine of the Trinity is the *only* doctrine of God that can be obtained from the teaching of the Bible

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as a whole. Indeed the following verse is a far closer approximation to and definition of the doctrine of the Trinity than the spurious verse 1 John 5.7:

> Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Matthew 28.19*

Only one, singular name of the three persons is referred to. In the Bible the word "name" used in such a context refers to the nature and character of the person or place so described. So Jesus speaks of only *one* name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - implying an absolute unity between them - and of only one *name* - implying a total similarity of character and essence. This verse is thoroughly Trinitarian in content and emphasis and therefore, as 1 John 5.7 merely endorses it, we do not see what effect the omission of this verse in modern translations has on Christian doctrine at all. Accordingly it is not worthy of any form of serious consideration.

d). His fourth point is such an outstanding fallacy that we marvel at his abysmal ignorance. He suggests that *the "inspired" authors of the canonical Gospels did not record a single word about the ASCENSION of Jesus* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.19). This claim is made pursuant to a reference to two statements about the ascension of Jesus in the Gospels of Mark and Luke which the RSV has identified as being among the variant readings we have earlier referred to. Apart from these verses the Gospel writers allegedly make no reference of any nature whatsoever to the ascension. On the contrary we find that *all four* knew of it perfectly well. John has no less than eleven references to it. In his Gospel Jesus says:

> I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God. *John 20.17*

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Luke not only wrote his Gospel but also the Book of Acts and in the latter book the first thing he mentions is the ascension of Jesus to heaven:

> And when Jesus had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. *Acts 1.9*

Matthew and Mark regularly speak of the second coming of Jesus from heaven (see, e.g., Matthew 26. 64 and Mark 14.62). It is difficult to see how Jesus could come from heaven if he had not ascended there in the first place.

In conclusion we must point out that the passages Mark 16. 9-20 and John 8. 1-11 have not been expunged from the Bible and later restored as Deedat suggests. In the RSV *translation* they are now included in the text because scholars are persuaded that they are indeed part of the original text. The truth of the matter is that in our oldest scripts they are found in some texts and not in others. The RSV editors are not tampering with the Bible as Deedat has suggested - they are merely trying to bring our English translations as close as possible to the original texts - unlike the editors of Uthman's reclension of the Qur'an who deemed it more expedient simply to destroy anything that varied in any way with their preferred text.

Finally it proves nothing to state that all the original manuscripts - those on which the books of the Bible were written for the first time - are now lost and have perished for the same is true of the very first texts of the Qur'an. The oldest text of the Qur'an still extant dates from the second century after the Hijrah and is compiled on vellum in the early *al-mail* Arabic script. Other early Qur'ans are in *Kufic* script and date from the same time as well.

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6. "ALLAH" IN THE BIBLE?

On page 22 of his booklet *Is the Bible God's Word?* Deedat reproduces a pamphlet allegedly showing that the Arabic word for God, *Allah*, is found in the Scofield translation of the Bible. Fortunately the evidence, in this case, is set before us to consider. A copy of a page from a Scofield Bible is reproduced and in a footnote we find that the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is derived from two words, *El* (strength) and *Alah* (to swear). This last word is supposed to be proof that the Arabic word *Allah* is found in the Bible!

A more far-fetched and fanciful effort to prove a point can hardly be imagined. The word in Hebrew is *alah*, a common word meaning "to swear". How this is supposed to be proof that the word *Allah* in Arabic, meaning God, is found in the Bible is altogether unclear to us. Deedat's effort to twist the facts further in suggesting that *Elah* in Hebrew (meaning God) has been spelt by the editors of the Scofield translation *alternatively as Alah* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.21) taxes our credulity to an unbearable extreme. These editors clearly identify the latter word as another one entirely meaning "to swear".

As if this was not enough, we are obliged to swallow even more of his unpalatable illogic when he suggests that the omission of the word *Alah* in the latest Scofield translation is proof that the word has been *blotted out ... in the Bible of the orthodox!* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.21). What is quite clear is that it has been omitted from a *footnote* in a *commentary* and we cannot possibly see how this can be regarded as a change in the text of the Bible itself! Elsewhere Deedat claims that Christians may not consider any footnote as part of

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the Word of God itself (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 17). It is a great pity that this man cannot apply to himself the standards he demands from others.

It will be useful to point out here, however, that there is nothing unique about the word *Allah*, nor must it be regarded as coming originally from the pages of the Qur'an. On the contrary it is quite clearly derived from the Syriac word *Alaha* (meaning "God") in common use among Christians in pre-Islamic times (cf. the authorities cited by Jeffery in *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, p.66). It was also in common use among the Arabs before Islam as appears from the name of Muhammad's own father Abdullah (i.e., "servant of God" from *abd*, meaning "servant", and *Allah*, meaning "God"). It is also certain that *Allah* was the name used for God in pre-Islamic poetry (Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, p.53). Accordingly there is nothing unique about the name at all. In the circumstances we really fail to see what Deedat is trying to prove or what his excitement is all about.

7. PARALLEL PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE.

We need not deal extensively with Deedat's chapter entitled *Damning Confessions* as these are nothing but honest admissions that the Bible has suffered textual errors such as those we have considered already. As we have also seen that the Qur'an has also been beset with the same problems, we do not believe that there is any further obligation on us to treat this red-herring seriously.

We do marvel, however, at a grossly inaccurate statement by Deedat to the effect that "out of over four thousand differing manuscripts the Christians boast about, the church fathers just selected four which tallied with their prejudices and called them

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Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.24). Once again Deedat has exposed his appalling ignorance of his subject for these four thousand scripts are copies of the 27 books which constitute the New Testament. Hundreds of these are copies of the four Gospels referred to. Statements like these force us to conclude that the booklet written by Deedat cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a scholarly critique of the Bible but rather a vociferous tirade against it by a man whose ignorance is matched only by his extreme prejudice against it.

Such prejudice is openly exposed on the next page where he claims that the five books of Moses cannot be regarded as being the Word of God or of Moses because statements like these, *The Lord said unto Moses...*, in the third person, appear quite frequently. Because Deedat cannot consider even for a moment that Moses might well have chosen to describe himself in the third person, he claims that these words come from "a third person writing from hearsay" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.25).

If so, then the Qur'an too must fall away as being neither the Word of God nor that of a prophet but of a "third person writing from hearsay" for similar statements are found in its pages, e.g.:

> When Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto thee. *Surah 5.110*

We cannot see any difference between the sayings where the *Lord* spoke to *Moses* in the Bible and where *Allah* spoke to *Jesus* in the Qur'an. Surely any criticism of the Biblical expression must rebound against the Qur'an as well.

Finally Moses obviously did not write his own

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obituary as Deedat implies. The 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy was written by his successor, Joshua the prophet, who also wrote the book of the same name which immediately follows it.

Deedat's sixth chapter deals with the authenticity of the four Gospels. He begins by suggesting that *internal evidence proves that Matthew was not the author of the first Gospel* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.26) purely because Matthew describes himself in his Gospel in the third person. We have already seen how feeble this line of reasoning is. God is alleged to be the author of the Qur'an yet he is described in it on numerous occasions in the third person. Once again we cannot see how a Muslim can seriously question the authorship of any book of the Bible purely because the author describes himself in the third person.

Furthermore a brief analysis of the reproduction of the introduction to the Gospel of Matthew by J.B. Phillips in Deedat's booklet proves very enlightening. Phillips says:

> Early tradition ascribed this Gospel to the apostle Matthew, but scholars nowadays almost all reject this view. The author, whom we can still conveniently call Matthew, has plainly drawn on the mysterious "Q", which may have been a collection of oral traditions.
> (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.28).

Anyone who knows the meaning of the expression *sweet reason* will give thoughtful consideration to the following facts:

1. Early Christian tradition unanimously ascribed this Gospel to Matthew. The subjective beliefs of some "modern scholars" cannot seriously be weighed

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against the objective testimony of those who lived at the time when this Gospel was first copied and distributed. In any event we question very seriously the charge that *almost all* scholars reject the authorship of Matthew for this Gospel. It is only a particular school of scholars who do this - those who do not believe in the story of creation, who write off the story of Noah and the flood as a myth, and who scoff at the idea that Jonah ever spent three days in the stomach of a fish. We are sure our Muslim readers will know what to make of such "scholars". On the contrary those scholars who accept that these stories are historically true practically without exception also accept that Matthew was the author of this Gospel.

2. Phillips says that the author can still conveniently be called Matthew purely because there is no reasonable alternative to his authorship of this Gospel, nor has the history of the early Church ever suggested another author.

3. The *mysterious "Q"* is only mysterious because it is the figment of the imagination of modern "scholars". It is not a mystery - it is a myth. There is no evidence of an historical nature whatsoever that such a *collection of oral traditions* ever existed.

Finally we find it hard to give serious consideration to Deedat's complaints about the fact that Matthew copied from Mark and that a chapter in Isaiah 37 is repeated in 2 Kings 19. The reasoning behind his suggestion that such *wholesale cribbing* (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.29) rules out the possibility that the Bible is the Word of God is extremely hard to follow.

One only needs to know the background of the Gospel of Mark to see through the folly of Deedat's

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line of argument. The Church Father Papias has recorded for us the fact that the Apostle Peter was the source of information for Mark's Gospel.

Peter had far more first-hand information about the life of Jesus than Matthew. The former's conversion is described in chapter 4 of Matthew's Gospel whereas the conversion of the latter appears only in chapter 9 - long after many events witnessed by the Apostle Peter had already taken place.

Furthermore Peter was often with Jesus when Matthew was not. The former witnessed the transfiguration (Mark 9.2) and was present in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14.33) while Matthew was absent on both occasions.

Matthew could hardly have found a more reliable source for his Gospel and, as he copied from a Biblical, scriptural text, we cannot see how his Gospel can lose the stamp of authority or genuineness.

If Deedat could show that Biblical narratives such as those he produces had parallels in *extra-Biblical* works predating the Gospels, where such works were known to be collections of fables and fairy-stories, we would treat his points more seriously. On the contrary, while such parallels are obviously lacking in Biblical cases, there are *many* stories in the Qur'an, set forth as true to history, which have awkward parallels in *pre-Islamic* Jewish books of fables and fairy-tales. We shall consider just one example.

The Qur'an records the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Surah 5. 27-32) which is also found in the Bible in the Book of Genesis. At one point, however, we find an unusual statement which has no parallel in the Bible:

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> Then Allah sent a raven scratching up the ground, to show him how to hide his brother's naked corpse. *Surah 5.31*

In a Jewish book of fables and folklore, however, we read that Adam wept for Abel and did not know what to do with his body until he saw a raven scratch in the ground and bury its deàd companion. At this Adam decided to do as the raven had done. (*Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 21).

In the Qur'an it is Cain who sees the raven and in the Jewish book it is Adam but, apart from this minor difference, the similarity between the stories is unmistakable. As the Jewish book predates the Qur'an it appears that Muhammad plagiarised the story and, with convenient adjustments, wrote it down in the Qur'an as part of the divine revelation! If this conclusion is to be resisted, we would like to be given sound reasons why it should be - especially when we consider the very next verse in the Qur'an which reads:

> For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. *Surah 2.32*

At first sight this verse appears to have no connection with the preceding narrative. Why the life or death of one should be as the salvation or destruction of all mankind is not at all clear. When we turn to another Jewish tradition, however, we find the link between the story and what follows. We turn to *The Mishnah* as translated by H. Danby and there we read these words:

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> We find it said in the case of Cain who murdered his brother, The voice of thy brother's bloods crieth (Genesis 4.10). It is not said here blood in the singular, but bloods in the plural, that is, his own blood and the blood of his seed. Man was created single in order to show that to him who kills a single individual it shall be reckoned that he has slain the whole race, but to him who preserves the life of a single individual it is counted that he hath preserved the whole race.
>
> (*Mishnah Sanhedrin*, 4.5).

According to the Jewish rabbi who wrote these words the use of the plural *bloods* in the Bible implies not only the blood of one man but that of his whole projeny. We consider his interpretation to be highly speculative but, be that as it may, we are constrained to ask how it is that the alleged revelation of Allah in the Qur'an is a patent repetition of the rabbi's beliefs! We can only conclude that Muhammad plagiarised the dictum about the whole nation from a Jewish source without showing (or even knowing!) where the link originates.

> By this comparison it is made clear what led Muhammad to this general digression: he had evidently received this rule from his informants when they related to him this particular event. (Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p.81).

The extraordinary sequel between the story of the raven in both the Qur'an and Jewish folklore and the subsequent philosophy about the implications of the murder of one man together with his seed clearly suggests that Muhammad was depending on certain informants for his information and that these verses could not possibly have come from God. This conclusion can hardly be resisted:

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> The story of the world's first murderer affords a most informing example of the influence of a Jew behind the scenes.
> (Guillaume, "The Influence of Judaism on Islam", *The Legacy of Israel*, p.139).

Instead of trying to make capital out of the passages in the Bible which have parallels elsewhere in the Bible, Deedat should rather give us an alternative explanation as to why Qur'anic passages are embarrassingly similar to and patently reliant on Jewish books of fables and folklore.

He closes his chapter by describing those who believe that *every word, comma and full stop of the Bible is God's Word* as "Bible-thumpers" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.33). Certainly we have no sympathy with fanatics who make such extreme claims for the Bible but, in the light of the evidence we have studied thusfar, we can only retort that those equally fanatical Muslims who in the same manner vainly make similar extremist claims for the Qur'an against all the evidence to the contrary must be viewed with the same disdain and deserve to be ridiculed as *Qur'an-thumpers*!

8. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE.

Deedat begins his seventh chapter *The Acid Test* with a claim that there is a contradiction between 2 Samuel 24.1, where we read that the Lord moved David to number Israel, and 1 Chronicles 21.1, which says it was Satan who provoked him to do so. Anyone who has a reasonable knowledge of both the Bible and the Qur'an will immediately perceive that Deedat is exposing nothing but his hopelessly inadequate understanding of a distinctive feature of the theology of both books. In the Qur'an itself we find a similar passage which sheds much light on this subject:

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> Seest thou not that we have set the devils on the disbelievers to confound them with confusion? *Surah 19.83*

Here we read that Allah sets devils on unbelievers. Therefore, whereas it is God who moves them to confusion, he uses the devils to provoke them towards it. In precisely the same way it was God who moved against David and used Satan to provoke him to number Israel. Likewise in the Book of Job in the Bible we read that Satan was given power over Job (*Ayub* in the Qur'an) to afflict him (Job 1.12) but that God later spoke as if it was he who was moved against him (Job 2.3). Whenever Satan provokes men the action can also indirectly be described as the movement of God for without his permission Satan could achieve nothing. This quote from Zamakshari's commentary on Surah 2.7 (*Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts*) should suffice as the final word on this matter:

> It is now in reality Satan or the unbeliever who has sealed the heart. However, since it is God who has granted to him the ability and possibility to do it, the sealing is ascribed to him in the same sense as an act which he has caused. (Gätje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p.223).

It appears that novices like Deedat should take a lesson in Qur'anic theology from renowned scholars like Zamakshari before exposing themselves to ridicule through unwarranted attacks on the Bible.

Deedat's further points about the three or seven years of plagues in 2 Samuel 24.13 and 1 Chronicles 21.11 and other similar discrepancies are all accounted for as minor copyist errors where scribes mistook one figure for another. For example in He-

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brew one very small word is used for 2000 in 1 Kings 7.26 and it is remarkably similar to the figure for 3000 found in 2 Chronicles 4.5 (see Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.42). To any objective enquirer it is clear that a scribe in the latter case mistook 2000 for 3000. In all the cases set out by Deedat we have minor copyist errors easily identifiable as such and not contradictions in the normal sense of the word as he suggests. No one has ever shown us what effect these negligible errors have on the contents of the Bible as a whole.

We can just as easily allege that there is a palpable contradiction in the Qur'an where a day with God is described as a *thousand years* in our reckoning (Surah 32.5) whereas in an earlier Surah such a day is described as *fifty thousand years* (Surah 70.4). Instead of haranguing about the fact that 2 Chronicles 9.25 speaks of four thousand stalls while 1 Kings 4.26 speaks of forty thousand, which he describes as a *staggering discrepency* (sic!) *of 36000* (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.44), Deedat should rather explain an even more staggering discrepancy of *49000* whole years which have summarily disappeared from the reckoning of a day with God in the Qur'an.

9. PORNOGRAPHY IN THE BIBLE?

In his next chapter Deedat makes much of the story of Judah's incest with Tamar (recorded in Genesis 38) and of similar stories in the Bible (such as Lot's incest with his daughters) and suggests that the Bible cannot be the Word of God because such stories are found in it.

We find this line of reasoning extremely hard to follow. Surely a book claiming to be the Word of God cannot be rejected as such because it shows up

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men - even the best of them - at their worst. All the stories Deedat refers to have to do with the wickedness of *men* and how the frank disclosure of the sins of men can affect the Bible's claim to be the Word of God is beyond comprehension. Throughout the Bible *God* is shown to be absolutely holy, perfectly righteous, and wonderfully loving. Very significantly Deedat nowhere suggests that the character of God in the Bible is worthy of reproach and surely this is all we really are concerned about when it comes to determining whether a book is the Word of God. If it unreservedly exposes the sins of men for what they are and refuses to cover up the excesses of even the best of them, it surely has a very fair claim to be God's Word - for it is concerned about his praise and not the praise of men. It is the glory of God that the Bible is concerned about - not the vainglory of men!

What is also significant is that Deedat conveniently overlooked a story in the Bible which reveals far greater wickedness than those he chooses to deal with. In 2 Samuel 11 we read that David saw Bathsheba bathing and had her brought in to him and he committed adultery with her. After this, when she conceived a child, David had her husband Uriah killed and took her as his own wife.

This story is at least the equal of all those referred to by Deedat in its wickedness but he carefully chooses to omit it. Why? Because the *Qur'an* also refers to it. We read in the 38th Surah that two men appeared before David and one who had ninety-nine ewes demanded the only ewe that the other had for himself. David retorted that he who had the ninety-nine had wronged the other in demanding his lone ewe. After this, however, we read that David realised that the parable was against himself and the Qur'an quotes Allah as saying of him:

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> David guessed that We had tried him and he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he bowed himself, and fell down prostrate and repented. So we forgave him that. *Surah 38. 25-26.*

As with the story of Cain and Abel we have a vague sequence of events which have no apparent connection with what precedes. How did God try David and what had he done that he repented of for which he received God's forgiveness? We have to turn to the Bible to find the answer. In 2 Samuel 12 we read that the prophet Nathan came to David and told him of a rich man who had flocks of lambs but, when he needed one for a meal, took the one precious lamb of one of his servants instead. David was angry at the rich man but Nathan said to him:

> You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah, and if this were too little I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites.
>
> *2 Samuel 12. 7-9.*

It is now clear how God had tried David. He had more than he could wish for and a host of wives but had taken the one wife of his servant for himself. When David responded *I have sinned against the Lord* Nathan answered *The Lord has also put away your sin* (2 Samuel 12.13). The stories in the Qur'an and the Bible are so similar that they clearly refer to the same cause - David's adultery with Bathsheba. We

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need only say two things in the circumstances. Firstly, Deedat obviously chose to ignore this story of David's wickedness because he knew that it had a sequel in the Qur'an. Secondly, the fact that the Qur'an upholds the Biblical narrative shows that there can be no genuine objection to similar stories where the misdemeanours of other prophets are set out in the Christian Bible.

All the prophets were men of flesh and blood and were as likely to fall into gross wickedness as any lesser mortal might, and the Bible cannot fairly be criticised for sparing them no mercy in exposing their deeds. Even Muhammad was a man of passions similar to those of any other man and, although he had up to nine wives at one time, he could not restrain his desire to cohabit with whichever one he chose rather than share the company of each in turn. When Surah 33.51 was "revealed", which gave him divine sanction to defer and receive whomever he wished of his wives at his own whim and discretion, his favourite wife Ayesha was constrained to comment:

> I feel that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your wishes and desires.
> (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.295).

Jesus Christ was the only man who lived who was not subject to the whims, desires and failings of other men. Deedat asks, in the light of 2 Timothy 3. 16, under what headings we can classify the stories he mentions. I will kindly oblige with an answer:

1. *Doctrine*. All men are sinners, including even the prophets and the best of men. All need forgiveness which comes through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

2. *Reproof*. Men cannot sin against God without incurring consequences. It is very interesting to see

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that immediately after the story of Judah's incest the only son of Jacob we hear of at any great length is Joseph - the one son whose conduct throughout the pages of Genesis remains blameless. He triumphed through his faithfulness while in time his less fortunate brothers had to bow the knee to him and beg him to give them their food for survival.

3. *Correction*. Although God may forgive us our sins he may yet make us suffer the consequences for our own good. David was forgiven of his adultery but he suffered four severe losses in his life as a result of his sin. Nevertheless this served to correct him for he never did anything remotely like this again.

4. *Instruction into Righteousness*. These events all show that man has no inherent righteousness but only the most awful potential, given the opportunity, to commit the worst of sins. We need to seek the righteousness of God instead which comes by faith in Jesus Christ. After repenting of the terrible crime he had committed, David prayed:

> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.
> *Psalm 51. 10-12.*

Sinners can obtain the righteousness of God by repenting of their sins, seeking God's forgiveness, and trusting to him for their salvation. As the Apostle Peter put it so well:

> Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Acts 2.38*

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10. THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST.

Deedat begins his last chapter with a suggestion that there is a contradiction between the genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke simply because there is a vast difference in the names listed by the two writers. To Deedat this distinction between these lists immediately proves that "both these authors are confounded liars" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.54). It taxes our credulity to believe that men who painstakingly recorded the most holy and truthful teaching ever given to mankind should turn out to be "confounded liars" as Deedat claims.

Fortunately we do not share Deedat's prejudice against the Bible and can afford to approach this question objectively. At the outset it is obviously true to say that every man has two genealogies - one through his father and one through his mother. Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus but he had to be regarded as his father for the sake of his genealogy as all Jews reckoned their genealogies through their fathers.

Therefore Matthew, without further ado, records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph's line and, in his succeeding narrative about the birth of Jesus, concentrates on Joseph's role as his natural guardian and as the husband of Mary his mother.

Deedat casually mentions that, according to Luke 3.23, Joseph was the *supposed* father of Jesus (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.52) without further comment. Here, in this one word, lies the key to the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Throughout the list of ancestors he names we find no mention of a woman. Although he concentrates on Mary's role in the birth of Jesus, when he comes to her genealogy

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he does not describe Jesus as the son of Mary but as the *supposed* son of Joseph, meaning that, for the sake of sustaining a masculine genealogy, Joseph was being named in her place. Luke has very carefully included the word "supposed" in his genealogy so that there could be no confusion about it and so that his readers would know that it was not the *actual* genealogy of Joseph that was being recorded. This very simple explanation does away immediately with alleged contradictions or problems.

> Even though the true facts have been explained for centuries, men blinded by prejudice continue to make this puerile charge for contradiction against the writers Matthew and Luke.
> (Finlay, *Face the Facts*, p.102).

Deedat, while endeavouring to sustain his claim that there is a contradiction between the Gospel-writers, also accuses Matthew of giving Jesus an ignoble ancestry by naming certain "adulterers and offspring of incest" (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 52) as his forefathers, as if this affected his total purity and holiness.

If we examine the Gospel of Matthew we will find four women named in the genealogy of Jesus. They are *Tamar*, who committed incest with Judah; *Rahab*, who was a prostitute and a Gentile; *Ruth*, who was a Gentile as well; and *Bathsheba*, who was an adulteress. Very significantly Matthew has named the four women in the ancestry of Jesus who had moral or ethnic defects. He has obviously done so deliberately and clearly did not think he was dishonouring Jesus by naming such women. If there was any stigma attached to such an ancestry he would surely have named some of the more holy women he was descended from, like Sarah and Rebecca. Why did he choose to specifically name the very four women who disturbed

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the "purity" of his ancestry? Matthew very quickly gives us his own answer. When the angel came to Joseph he said of the child to be born:

> You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. *Matthew 1.21*

It was precisely for people such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba that Jesus came into the world. He came to save such people from their sins and to make his salvation available to all men, both Jew and Gentile alike. As he himself said to the Jews and to his disciples on one occasion:

> Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'. For I came not to call the righteous but sinners. *Matthew 9. 12-13.*

If you, the reader, imagine that the religious efforts you have made over the years count for some sort of righteousness before God and that your sins will be glossed over by a God who cares little for the manner in which they confront his holiness, then pursue your futile quest for self-righteousness. You need not look to Jesus for he cannot help you. There is no one who can help you.

But if you know that your sins are many and if you have discovered your true self, and have found that there is no righteousness in you but only gross wickedness; if you have been so honest with yourself as to admit these facts, then turn to Jesus for he came to save men like you and he is able to cleanse you and deliver you from all your sins.

We do not propose to deal at any length with Deedat's queries about the authors of the books of

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the Bible. Jesus confirmed that all the books of the Old Testament as received by the Jews were the inspired and authoritative Word of God, constantly quoting from them and declaring that the Scriptures, as received by them, could not be broken (John 10. 35), and the Holy Spirit has uniformly testified through all quarters of the Christian Church to the equal authority of the books of the New Testament.

The Qur'an too, as we have seen, likewise gives full support to the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians at the time of Muhammad as being the genuine Taurat and Injil, the very Word of God. Those books were the Old and New Testaments as we know them. No one can sincerely doubt these facts.

11. CONCLUSION.

We can only draw one conclusion from all that has been said. *Deedat has failed to discredit the Bible as the Word of God*. Like Joommal before him, he has only exposed himself as an unworthy critic of the Christian scriptures.

Furthermore it is sad to see the negative spirit and attitude that pervades every page of his booklet. Nowhere is there any effort to treat the contents of the Bible objectively. Not once is a good word said for it and it amazes us that any one could read through the Bible and write a treatise on it that is purely critical. From first page to last the reader is confronted with a spirit of excessive prejudice, one truly unworthy of a self-acclaimed "scholar of the Bible".

On page 41 of his booklet he urges his readers to obtain a free Bible from our fellowship. I decided one day to visit one of the many Muslims who had, in consequence, written to us for a Bible and

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found that this young man had followed Deedat's advice on the same page to mark all the alleged contradictions and pornographic passages in coloured ink. He wasted no time in finding the texts he was looking for, which Deedat had vainly promised him would "confute and confuse any missionary or Bible scholar" (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.41) who happened to come his way. Apart from these texts the young man, however, had made no effort to read the Bible or find out what it actually taught.

We had hoped that the spirit of the Crusades was buried by now but it appears that certain Muslim authors are determined to revive it in the hearts of the Muslim youth of today. Surely any sincere Muslim will agree that such an approach to the Bible is thoroughly questionable. What profit can be gained by perusing a book with no other purpose than to find fault with it? What sort of mentality is this that motivates men to seek nothing but supposed errors in a book before they have even read a word of it? Well did a Christian author say of the Bible:

> It is thus a wondrous Word that God has given to man. Its depth and beauty will largely be missed by those who read with only an eye to criticise. (Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, p.138).

I have often been heartened to receive letters from Muslims requesting Bibles which show a very deep measure of respect for it and have also been encouraged to discover that there are other Muslim authors in the world who take a different approach to our Holy Book. The Islamic Foundation, a well-known Muslim organisation which has published many books on Islam, has adopted a far more mature and respectable attitude to the Bible. It encourages all Muslims to do likewise and has this to say of the Christian faith in one of its publications:

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> The importance of need for a Muslim to study Christianity requires no emphasis ... While Islam is being studied by many Christian students, few Muslims have taken the study of Christianity as a serious task ... The situation in which Muslims find themselves today demands that they study Christianity ... Certainly the best approach to study Christianity is to consult its own source materials and analyse the thoughts and presentations of its adherents, instead of indulging in cheap polemics as regretably some Muslim writers have done in the past.
>
> (Ahmad Von Denffer, *General and Introductory Books on Christianity*, p.4).

What sound words of wisdom these are! Unfortunately, as we have seen, it is not only some Muslim writers of the past who have indulged in cheap harangue against the Bible. It is still going on today through the likes of Deedat and Joommal. We can only endorse the sentiments in the quotation we have given and must say to our Muslim readers that they will obtain nothing but a thoroughly distorted view of Christianity from booklets such as the one we have refuted in this publication.

As the wiser Muslim has said, the best way for Muslims to gain a true understanding of the Christian faith is to obtain books written by Christians who truly believe in it. This quote is well worthy of the consideration of all sincere Muslims:

> There is no reason why those established in their faith should not read the Bible. This line may be taken with those who aver their strong faith in Islam. Possession of the Qur'an need not debar the Moslem from making acquaintance with scriptures of such unique historical, moral and instructive importance for all men as the

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> Bible. Many Moslems having at first, through ignorance, rejected the Bible, later on learning its true contents have reckoned it their priceless treasure. (Harris, *How to Lead Moslems to Christ*, p.17).

We shall willingly supply a free Bible to any Muslim who will read it openly with a genuine desire to discover what it really teaches, who will not deface it in any way as Deedat recommends by colouring in its texts (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p.41), and who will show it the same respect that he would like Christians to show to the Qur'an. Those who share Deedat's prejudices, however, should not bother to open a Bible until they have changed their attitude towards it. They are like those of whom the Qur'an speaks when it says their likeness is *as the likeness of the ass carrying books* (Surah 62.5). As the donkey is unaware of the value of the load on its back, so such men are ignorant of the spiritual treasure they have taken into their unwashed hands.

May God Almighty, in his great mercy and love, grant that we may all come to the knowledge of his holy truth - and that we may be willing to seek it wherever it may be found. May all Muslims who have the immense privilege of possessing a Bible discover its glorious truths and radiant beauty by reading it openly with a sincere desire to know and understand its teachings and guidance.

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QUIZ

THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE QURAN AND THE BIBLE

by John Gilchrist

If you have read this booklet carefully, you will be able to answer the following questions, which are a part of our Bible Correspondence School:

1. How was God's word recorded in the Holy Bible?
2. Write two Quranic verses proving the unchangeableness of the Old and New Testaments. Give their references.
3. What is the difference between a Bible translation and a Bible manuscript (or version)?
4. Why did Uthman order the burning of all Quran manuscripts and kept only his?
5. How do you understand the word "virgin" or "almah" as you find it in Isaiah 7:14?
6. Write some New Testament verses that talk about the ascension of Jesus.
7. Why did the evangelist Matthew use Mark's Gospel as a resource book Matthew wrote his Gospel?
8. How can you reconcile II Samuel 24:1 with I Chronicles 21:1?

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9. How do you explain recording the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38?
10. How can you harmonize between the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew and Luke's Gospels?

Write the answers to these questions on a separate sheet, without any other remarks. If you have answered two thirds of the questions correctly, we will send you another one of our publications, so that you may strengthen yourself in faith, hope and love.

LIGHT OF LIFE P.O.BOX 13 A-9503 VILLACH (AUSTRIA)

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